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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 005610

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SUBJECT: TURKISH READOUT OF ARPAKAN-FRENCH CONSULTATIONS ON
EU ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS

REF: PARIS 5528 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

1. (C) Summary: Turkish Deputy Under Secretary Apakan's August 17 and 18 discussions with officials in FM Douste-Blazy's and PM de Villepin's cabinets provided no new clarity on French motives and intentions. The French rehearsed familiar arguments about the need to take French public opinion into account following the failed May 29 referendum, while insisting that they did not intend to be an obstacle to the beginning of accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3. Most telling was a "personal" request, rebuffed by Apakan, that Turkey issue a clarification that the French could use as a fig leaf presumably to allow it to draw back from the brink. So far the French have indicated no clear intention to do so. But even if they are looking for a way out, a question remains as to what France would need -- on Cyprus or other issues -- in order to back away from their current position. The French continued to indicate that French policy has not yet been fixed, pending exchanges with other EU partners at the August 31 Coreper and September 1-2 informal ministerial. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Pol deputy met August 19 with Turkish Counselor Bashkan Oz (or Oez) to obtain a readout of Turkish MFA Deputy Under Secretary for Cyprus Ertugrul Apakan's August 17 and 18 consultations with FM Douste-Blazy's chef de cabinet Pierre Vimont and PM de Villepin's diplomatic advisor Christophe Farnaud. (Farnaud declined to respond to an inquiry from POL M/C.)

3. (C) Oz said that Apakan's formal mission was to provide an explanation of Turkish thinking behind its July 29 statement on the enlargement protocol, but he dismissed French claims that the statement had created a "new" element that needed to be taken into consideration. The Turkish MFA had consulted closely with international lawyers in elaborating the statement to ensure it would not invalidate the protocol. Moreover, negotiations in the run-up to the December 2004 summit had made clear that "both sides would clarify their positions" on the Cyprus question; this, in fact, had formed the legal basis for the Turkish declaration. French objections to Turkish references to "partnership" on Cyprus were unfounded, as similar language was to be found in the Annan plan. Similarly, the French lamely cited unspecified translation problems with the Turkish statement from English into French, which was not credible given PM de Villepin's diplomatic experience.

4. (C) Oz claimed that Vimont and Farnaud had made it clear that the French position was motivated largely by the need to take into account the results of the failed May 29 referendum on the EU constitutional treaty. It was necessary to proceed slowly on all EU-related issues, including enlargement. While France had no desire to create obstacles for the beginning of accession negotiations, it needed to satisfy public opinion. Oz was explicit that neither Vimont nor Farnaud suggested that French statements to date should be equated with new preconditions. The Turks were told that France had not yet defined its position, and that this would be done only after consultation with other EU partners. The French had inquired about Turkish soundings in other European capitals.

5. (C) Asked whether the French had had any ideas for overcoming the current impasse, Oz said they had asked "on a personal basis only" whether Turkey would be prepared to make a new statement clarifying its June 29 declaration. Oz said this would not be possible, given domestic political sensitivities in Turkey. Oz said Arpakan had referred the French to Turkey's June 1 letter to the UN SYG Annan on Cyprus. Pol deputy asked whether Turkey would be prepared to state simply that its June 29 unilateral statement on the customs union protocol should be interpreted in light of the earlier letter to the UN explaining its willingness to allow free movement of goods and services and open sea and air ports. This would not be possible, he said, given that ratification of the customs union extension, scheduled for October 4, was already facing considerable opposition in parliament.

6. (C) Pol deputy noted that the U.S. hoped the negotiations would begin as planned on October 3 and was

considering ways to approach EU members. Oz stressed the importance of beginning accession negotiations, stressing their importance in promoting reform. Whether they eventually ended in EU membership was not a question that either side needed to resolve at the moment. Turkey understood that it would need to recognize Cyprus before any eventual accession. But if pushed if to choose between the EU and Cyprus too soon, it would have to choose the latter.

Comment

17. (C) As we have noted before, it appears that the French will not define their position until after the August 31 Coreper and September 1-2 Gymnich meetings. Even assuming that the French hope to climb down from their demands, however, it remains unclear how this can be accomplished in a face-saving way, given the apparent weakness of their position. The way out could lie in the last para of the French non-paper, which demands that Turkey clearly express its intention to recognize each one of the EU member states. Perhaps the Turks could be persuaded to work with this idea, although the French informal suggestion that the Turks make an additional statement was reportedly dismissed as a non-starter for the Turks. Another option could be to seek a strengthening of the EU anti-statement or additional conditionality in the negotiating framework. Our British colleague speculated August 18 that France may want to wait until CDU leader Angela Merkel takes over as Chancellor in Germany (assuming that occurs) before softening in order to ensure continuity of follow-up. Christian Heldt, the German advisor on Franco-German relations in the FM's cabinet, told Pol M/C today, however, that the French may have misinterpreted Merkel's calls for a privileged partnership with Turkey as willingness to delay the opening of negotiations. Our British colleague speculated that France might be looking for a quid pro quo in other areas, for example UK agreement to abandon its proposed mid-term review of EU financing.
Hofmann